

the iwca independent

national newsletter of the Independent Working Class Association - issue 1 - Autumn 2003

WORKING CLASS RULE IN WORKING CLASS AREAS!

IWCA launched as national organisation

After New Labour won the 1997 general election Tony Blair went to the Aylesbury estate in the London Borough of Southwark. Against a backdrop of graffiti and broken windows, he made a promise that under New Labour there would be 'no more forgotten people'. Six years on what has happened?

On Monday 28 July 2003, the Independent Working Class Association went back to the Aylesbury estate and launched itself as a national organisation. Why? Because New Labour has failed. Tony Blair's promise has been comprehensively broken. Speaking at the launch, IWCA Chair Neil Stanton, summed up the situation:

Labour's "big idea"

"Nothing has really changed. New Labour's 'big idea' it turned out, was to demolish people's homes and replace them with private apartments. When this was rightly rejected, Labour turned its back on the people here just as it has done to numerous working class communities across the country.

It says everything about New Labour's sincerity that the local Council hasn't even got around to properly fixing the broken windows in the six years since Blair used them as a prop. So much then for the talk of there being "no forgotten people" in New Labour's Britain."

Faced with this indifference and hostility, working class communities up and down the country, desperately need to develop their own new thinking, new strategies and tactics. Since its establishment in 1995, the IWCA has tried to help communities do just that, through a series of innovative and energetic pilot schemes. These have already yielded impressive electoral results and a number of notable campaign successes.

Impressive results

One of those impressive results was the election of IWCA candidate Stuart Craft to Oxford City Council. Initially shocked, the New Labour councillors comforted themselves that a lone IWCA representative would be isolated and dragged under by the responsibilities of local government. It hasn't happened. As Stuart says: "Neither has proven to be the case. The core IWCA philosophy has proven itself sufficiently coherent and robust to allow me to intervene, and, all importantly make a dif-



The IWCA launch nationally on the Aylesbury Estate. Within weeks of being elected in 1997 Blair came here and talked of "empowerment", of giving people the "will to win", yet nothing has really changed. The local Council hasn't even got around to properly fixing the broken windows in the six years since Blair used them as a prop.

ference on a range of issues, most notably in how the council respond to issues such as Class A drug dealing in Blackbird Leys, which hitherto, the politicians, media and police preferred to pretend was not a problem."

By keeping "immediate working class interests" to the fore, one IWCA representative has already made a difference. Imagine how much more we can shake things up when others come on board. Unsurprisingly the Blackbird Leys IWCA is looking forward to next year's Oxford City Council elections.

All middle class now

After twenty years of Thatcherism many working class people placed their trust in New Labour. That trust has been betrayed. Worse still, when New Labour announced that "we're all middle class now" they abandoned the working class. Gary O'Shea, a founding member of the IWCA, calls this process 'social cleansing' since:

"If we really are "all middle class now" then there is no need to cater to a working class with specific interests, aspirations, and concerns. The evidence of this 'social cleansing' is there for all to see. It's there in the 57,000 households living in temporary accommodation in London. It's there

in the similar scenarios being played out in the NHS, pensions, education, child care...the list goes on. It's there in the biggest ever recorded gap between the wealthy and the rest of us." And it is in this climate that Gary states:

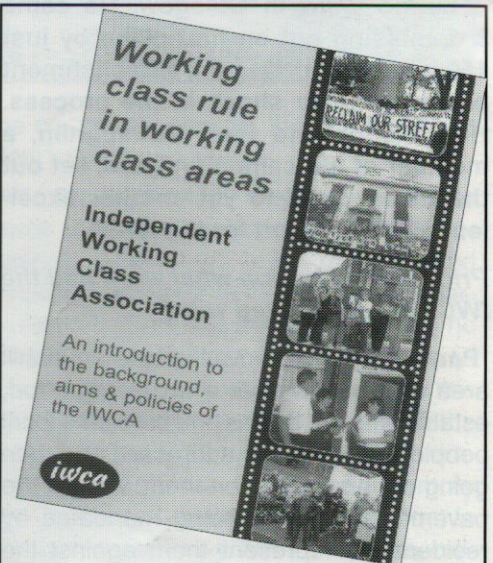
"We are all faced with a choice. We can compliantly go down the American route where the poor are effectively politically disenfranchised, or we can offer the working class people of this country a radical change of direction, which is of course what we are determined to do."

on the web

The IWCA has launched a national website, featuring a regularly updated news page and analysis of the latest political developments, as well as the popular "Councillor's Diary" written by Stuart Craft, IWCA councillor on the Blackbird Leys estate, Oxford.

The website also features "Communities of Resistance", news of working class communities across the country - and beyond - fighting back to regain control of their political lives.

To visit the IWCA website go to: www.iwca.info



Working Class Rule in Working Class Areas

- an introduction to the background, aims and policies of the IWCA

Hard copies of the IWCA's manifesto are available from the postal address / email address below.

The manifesto is full of photos illustrating IWCA campaign work in various working class communities across the country, ranging from fighting council corruption in Hertfordshire to confronting a mugging epidemic in Birmingham. From opposing the privatisation of council housing in London to taking up the fight against antisocial crime in Essex.

The manifesto introduces readers to the background of the IWCA and provides a detailed question and answer section. It also outlines the IWCA's policies on a range of issues, including youth provision, drugs, asylum seekers and immigration.

Copies are available for £1 including p&p.

Contact the IWCA

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INSIDE:

Changing the Face of Southside Politics • Putting the Working Class Back on London's Political Map • Justice For Christopher

In May this year Kenny Martin stood as the IWCA candidate for the Strathbungo ward in Glasgow. He came 3rd, missing out on first place by just 150 votes and giving the establishment parties a nasty shock in the process. Here Kenny and Paul McLaughlin, a member of the campaign team, set out the background to yet another excellent election result for the IWCA.

Prior to the election what work had the IWCA been involved with?

Paul - The IWCA canvassed the Govanhill area of Glasgow over a two-year period, establishing the issues and problems local people wished to see addressed and then going out and acting on them. We got the pavements fixed by being mandated by residents to represent them against the council, we spoke to the council on health and safety issues over one of their buildings and dealt with this by getting some demolition and the building made structurally secure. We stopped them leasing out a council building to a private business based on the fact the community didn't want to see extra traffic in the area. We were then allowed the opportunity to put forward the views of what the community wanted done, which the council refused to pay for.

Further to the work that was carried out in the Govanhill area, we were also involved in a campaign on the opposite side of the city to save a local park from being sold by Labour to private developers and that's ongoing.

Kenny - Wider to that we were also involved with other parties and individuals in the Defend Council Housing campaign. Although unsuccessful, the campaign did bring people into a wider discussion regarding political representation.

Paul - It demonstrated the level of work that we could carry out on a citywide basis with a limited number of people. It also showed up the weaknesses of established organisations such as the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) and Scottish National Party (SNP) whose failure to get their members out to canvass working class areas and bring out a NO vote lost us the campaign.

How come you stood against the SSP?

Kenny - Before the IWCA had been formed in the city; some of us had joined the SSP to see the kind of work they were involved in. We quickly established that when we put items on the agenda involving working class communities this was not of interest to the left. It was the old story of paper sales, meetings on environmental issues, etc. The proof of the pudding finally came when the person who ran that branch stood in the council elections - after being in the area for four years - and got nowhere near winning a council seat; while the IWCA, with two years work, came closer in Glasgow to winning a council seat than any SSP branch except Pollock (where they already held the seat).

Paul - It wasn't even thought of that we wouldn't stand. The SSP are an established party who operate the same as all parties do. It's party before community. We're community before party. If we want to build strong organisations it has to be from the bottom up. They're not interested in that. They are starting at the top and building down. This is not what the IWCA

is about.

Kenny - An example would be the campaign to save the local community pool. Two papers were put forward with very similar views that for the long term we carry out door-to-door consultation, find out what the community wants, build a political base from this and thereafter stand in the council elections. When the vote came, those in favour lost by one vote and the opportunity was lost to a working class community. The people who voted against it were the party activists so there is no point in being involved with these people if they're always putting the party first.

Paul - At no time did the SSP or we discuss anyone standing aside. At the time we would never have asked a rival organisation to stand aside. That is for them to think about. We were on the streets setting out to achieve what we wanted and then achieving it; working within working class communities and raising the profile of working class politics. They have no intention of doing that.

During the election what tactics and issues were employed. What was the reaction of residents and the establishment? What were the IWCA activists' thoughts?

Paul - The issues that we fought the campaign on were those that had been brought up on the doorstep by ordinary punters within the area.

Kenny - Issues like anti-social behaviour, graffiti, vandalism etc. We also listened to the concerns of the youth in the area and put forward proposals based on getting more finance into the area to address the lack of facilities.

Paul - But the main thrust we put to people was that the other parties could not represent them on the issues they wanted heard. The established parties have no interest in working class communities. This was evident on many occasions



A fun day in Govanhill, Glasgow, after a successful community clean-up initiated by the IWCA and supported by local residents.

Labour MSP Gordon Jackson was out with a radio crew doing interviews in the area. He asked a local resident if they were voting Labour. "No" came the answer, "we're voting IWCA!"

three to five times; the other parties were lucky if they went out once. They relied on their information being passed on a city-wide basis and what little work was carried out locally was always on national issues. No one spoke on local issues.

Kenny - Our tactics were to produce a leaflet which introduced our manifesto, introduced our candidate, attacked the rival candidates and then going out, knocking

doors and seeing if people were planning on voting and, if so, who for. Were they aware of what we had been doing in the last two years? We then followed this up with a second leaflet and in some cases, where we couldn't get to speak to

people, another leaflet arguing why they should vote for us. The last two weeks were spent knocking doors ensuring people were going to turn out for us and turning those 'still thinking about it' into voters.

On the day of the election we were scoring off our voters as they left the polling station so we could chase up those who hadn't turned out. We were still chapping doors with 30 minutes to go.



Residents in Partick protest against plans by the Labour Party to sell Thornwood Park

would happen. But once you start talking to people the response is amazing. Some would acknowledge what we had been doing over the last two years straightaway, while others made the link to whom we were once we explained the things that had gone on in the area.

Paul - We felt that if we got 200 votes we would be doing well. We doubled our

when people highlighted that no other organisation had been on their doors during the election period. We had visited these people

expectations and to beat established parties was unbelievable. It has also become clear that was if we had had another three to five bodies we feel we could have won the seat.

Kenny - The reaction of the other parties was shock and outrage. The Labour candidate's bottled crashed within minutes of the ballot boxes being opened. He had the fags out, was sweating profusely and was leaving the building. "We've fucked up" was his comment.

Paul - The SSP were of the same opinion in that we were in a strong position. What we have been told was that in the poorest area the turnout had been increased 50% by our vote alone. That terrified them. Prior to the ballots being counted there had been disdain from them and a feeling that we were amateurs who didn't know what we were doing. I think we have demonstrated clearly what we're about and that we're up to the challenge.

Kenny - One of the best comments came from the retiring Labour councillor who said we'd "changed the face of Southside politics." Probably the funniest moment was when Labour MSP Gordon Jackson was out with a radio crew doing interviews in the area. He asked a local resident if they were voting Labour. "No" came the answer, "we're voting IWCA!" He was overheard saying that we had no chance so hopefully we've proved him wrong.

Paul - The comments from the SSP were a grudging well done, as we had beat them into third place. Unfortunately, there were other SSP members who made bitter comments about us being right-wingers and fascists!?! How you turn trying to put forward working class politics into fascism, I don't know.

What have you done since the election?

Kenny - Since the election we have formed a fully constituted residents association to carry on the work initiated as a response to the problem of anti-social behaviour in the last year. I'm also the interim chair of the newly formed local community council, which again is stuff we have been working on for the past two years. We now have the vehicles in place that can be used to ensure that about 20,000 people get their opinions heard and acted upon. That's how we can further our political ambitions. The IWCA can't be seen as being able to do certain things but give-up because we are not elected. Being constituted means hopefully we have access to the resources necessary to supply the facilities the community needs but the council are not interested in providing.

Paul - On my side of the city, the work has to be done to get us into a position to stand at the next election. To that end work is slowly being done to draw in interested parties. We are looking to involve ourselves in the community council. We're also looking at what facilities are needed in the area and starting to put together a strategy that might bring in the resources necessary. The park campaign is now becoming a broader issue regarding community facilities, community funding, community development and we are doing this off the back of regular consultation within the community.

"WE'RE BACK"

putting the working class back on London's political map

Pete Coen, the IWCA's campaign co-ordinator for the GLA and Mayoral elections, explains why we're standing, what we've been doing to raise money and how you can help.

Registered as a political party a little less than two years ago, the IWCA will be the newest party to compete in the Greater London Assembly (GLA) election in June 2004. Compared to our mainstream rivals, the IWCA will also be the smallest party involved. Politics apart, another not unimportant distinction will also be apparent. From top to bottom the IWCA is a working class organisation.

Now while this reality affords IWCA strategists many advantages in terms of policy-making, there is also one enormous drawback. This is, that along with 50 per cent of the population the average member in work is on, or some way under, the £20,000 median wage. It follows therefore that in terms of finding ways of raising funds outside of what is required for printing local newsletters and the like, simply instructing branches or individual members to dig deep is often not the most productive way to generate extra income.

Therefore, in order to raise the £20,000 needed to put up an independent working class candidate for Mayor in June 2004, IWCA members have been involved in an imaginative number of initiatives to

raise the cash. So far these have included sponsored walks, barbecues, and even car-boot sales, with quiz nights, pool tournaments and gigs in the offing.

Along with an encouraging response to the initial public appeal in June, these efforts, have to date generated in the region of £6,000.

Which leaves us around eight months to raise the other £14,000, working out at roughly £1,500 a month.

This comes, remember, on top of the everyday financial costs incurred by a small organisation competing at street level against the mainstream parties. So you will not be surprised to hear that, we are asking for your help. This can come in the form of a one off donation,

or a standing order. Every penny will count and every penny is gratefully received.

Fundraising apart, let's remind ourselves what else we are up against. A recent report by Jubilee Research in the Guardian's economic pages presents some fairly astonishing figures. In 1976 the top 50% of UK households owned 88% of total non-housing wealth. Today they own 99%, meaning the bottom 50% of all households own 1%. How has this happened? It's actually fairly simple. Since the mid 1970's the working class has suffered a series of direct reverses, beginning with the 'winter of discontent' under 'Old Labour', leading on to the Thatcher victory, the defeat of the miners, the mismanagement of the fight against

Simply putting up an independent working class candidate for London Mayor will not reverse 25 years of misrule overnight. But to millions of ordinary people living in beleaguered communities it will still say 'you are not alone'. To a pampered Middle England and their fat cat representatives the message will be equally clear. 'We're back'.

the community charge, the emergence of New Labour and so on. But accompanying these humiliations came a more insidious form of propaganda which has been disseminated through the media and mainstream parties to the effect that the working class no longer actually exists: a process referred to by some as 'politicide'. In real terms this airbrushing of the working class from the political landscape has informed government policy for over quarter of a century from health to housing, from education, to transport to policing. After all what sensible ministerial department would attempt to cater to the needs of a class that no longer exists?

the community charge, the emergence of New Labour and so on.

Now simply putting up an independent working class candidate for London Mayor will not reverse 25 years of misrule overnight. But even with the IWCA manifesto put to one side, to millions of ordinary people living in beleaguered communities it will still say 'you are not alone'. To a pampered Middle England and their fat cat representatives the message will be equally clear. 'We're back'.

Help us shape history. Make a contribution. Get involved.

Fundraisers and Social Events

Over £6000 has already been raised since the GLA appeal was launched but there is a long way to go. Events such as those mentioned here have helped raise valuable funds and other events are planned, including snooker tournaments, car boot sales and gigs.



A sponsored walk through Jersey by IWCA members raised another £1000

For details of other fundraisers get in touch with your local branch.

To donate money to the GLA campaign see the "What You Can Do" section.



One of two successful fundraising barbecues held in south London in the summer. £1500 was raised.

What You Can Do

In June 2004 the IWCA are proposing to stand in the Greater London Assembly elections. As well as this we are looking to put forward an independent working class candidate for the position of London Mayor.

In order to stand a Mayoral candidate we will need to find 10 sponsors in each of the 32 London boroughs, and in the City of London.

This is a formidable task complicated by the fact that as a new party - registered in September 2001 - we are only two years old and there are many boroughs where we neither have branches nor supporters. On top of that we will need to raise the £10,000 deposit, plus an additional £10,000 contribution toward printing costs - and we have less than a year to do it.

At present you can contribute in two ways.

HELP US FINANCIALLY

One way is by helping out financially. You can contribute by filling in the standing order form on page 4

and returning it to the IWCA national address. We're also launching a "100 Club" where we're asking 100 people to commit to donating £100 each. If you can help in this way please contact us at the addresses or phone number on page 1. Contributions however big or small will be very welcome. If you are already a member of the IWCA you can also help by supporting the fundraising events we've organised.

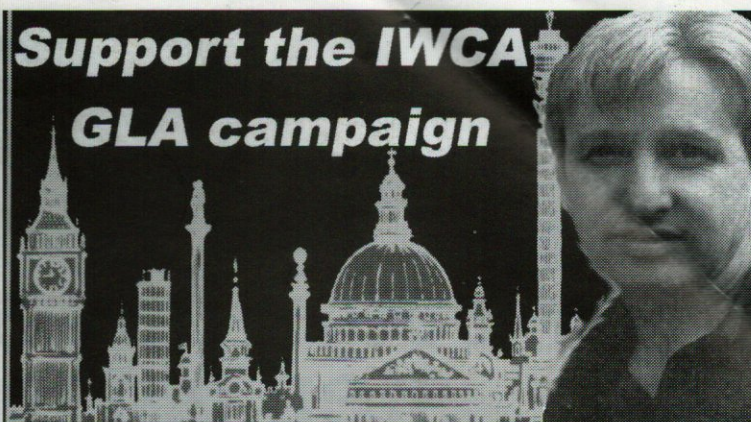
SIGN NOMINATION PAPERS

The second way to help, if you live in the greater London area, is to agree to sign the necessary sponsorship forms. In all we require ten sponsors from each of the 32 London Boroughs and the City of London.

In many boroughs we still need signatures, so if you can sign or know others who would be willing to, contact us at the addresses or phone number, shown on page 1. With less than 9 months to go, it is essential that anyone who supports the IWCA

and its aims should do what they can.

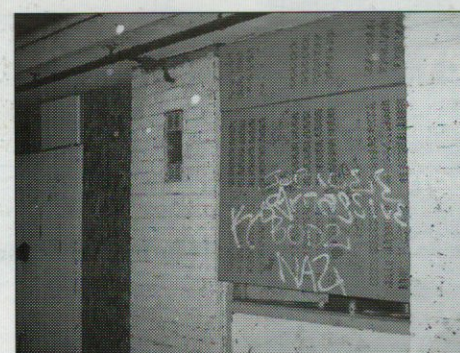
Help the IWCA's GLA campaign. Pledge your support today.



Support the IWCA
GLA campaign



A Tale of Two Cities?
Armani-suited concierges at a new private development (above)
Council flats boarded up and abandoned despite huge waiting lists, just over a mile away (below)



Help us make 10 June 2004
'Working Class Independence' Day

JUSTICE FOR CHRISTOPHER

High court decision takes family step closer to justice

"I am simply delighted by this decision. I have always felt that the HSE failed to properly investigate my son's death or take the right prosecution decision. These legal proceedings provide an opportunity to challenge the way the HSE dealt with my son's death. So, not only are we a step closer to getting to the truth, but this decision by the High Court is the first official acknowledgment I have ever had from anyone that Christopher's death was not simply his own fault."

So said Karen Pullen after the decision by the High Court to make the actions of the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) subject to a 'judicial review', vindicated the three year battle waged by family and campaigners to have those responsible for twelve year old Christopher Pullen's death held to account. It is believed that this is only the second time that the HSE has been subject to a full High Court judicial review hearing. The decision also marks a huge success for the Justice For Christopher Campaign - in which Islington IWCA members have played a central role - a campaign that from the outset put the council on the back foot, highlighted their disregard for working class estates and involved the local community throughout.

12-year-old Christopher Pullen was crushed to death on 8th September 2000 when a heavy steel framed door fell on him on the Market Estate in Islington, North London. A year on there had been no apology, no improvements on the estate and no prosecutions; Islington Council had even taken Karen Pullen to court over unpaid Council Tax, despite the fact she was on full benefits.

The door was off its hinges and had been propped up against a well in a stairwell of the flats. For years, tenants on the Market Estate feared it would 'take the death of child' before the council took its responsibilities seriously. Other serious accidents where children had fallen out of fourth floor windows, had left the council unmoved.

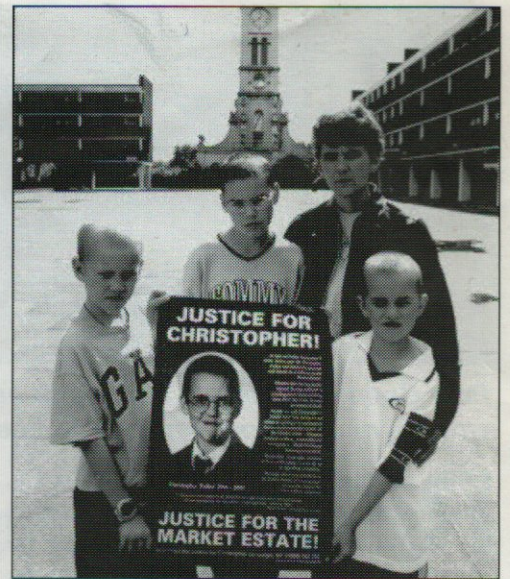
The door which killed Christopher had, at some stage, been reinforced with steel

plating and may have weighed as much as 16 stone but had been left lying off its hinges for months. It was even reported in the 'very urgent repair category' almost two months previously.

The HSE investigated the incident and in March 2001 made its first decision not to prosecute Islington Council, who owned the estate, or Hyde Housing Association which was responsible for the Council's housing management.

In February 2002, following a meeting between the HSE, Karen Pullen, Gary O'Shea of Islington IWCA and the HSE's Regional Director for London, Murray Devine agreed to refer the papers to its newly set up prosecution team of lawyers.

In January 2003, the HSE informed Karen Pullen that, following this review, the HSE decided again not to prosecute due to 'insufficiency of evidence', and explained



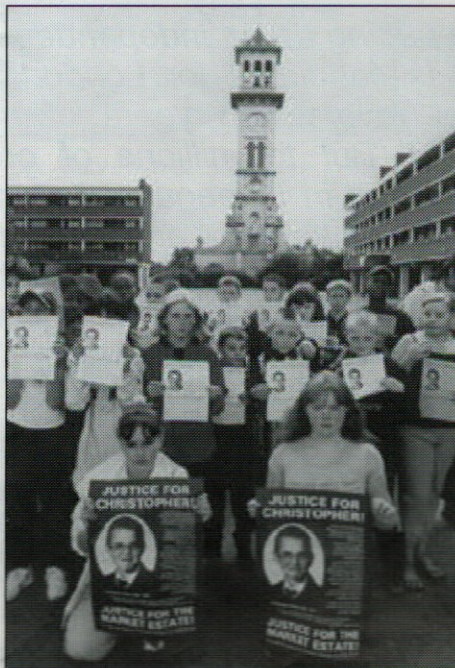
Christopher's mother, Karen Pullen, with brothers Sean, Kevin and Ben

the reasons for its decision at a meeting in March 2003. It is this decision - and the reasons given at the March meeting - that are being challenged.

"From the moment I got involved with the case two years ago I was struck right away by the complete lack of rigour displayed by the HSE," said Gary O'Shea. "Their investigating officers did not seem to treat the case with the degree of seriousness appropriate to a death of a child. They did not for instance even manage to get to the site until two full weeks after the accident. The decision by the HSE not to prosecute following the death of a twelve year old boy will now be subject to a 'judicial review' before the High Court following a ruling by Mr Justice Moses.

The Pullen family is now being represented by the solicitor, Louise Christian, known for her work on high profile cases such as the Paddington rail and Marchioness disasters.

For more details on the Justice For Christopher Campaign see <http://www.iwca-islington.org.uk/christopher.htm>



Kids from the Market Estate show their support for the campaign

Independent Working Class Association Membership application form

iwca

Name _____

Address _____

Post code _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

I enclose my national membership fee of £5 for one year ☐

(Please make cheques payable to 'IWCA')

I wish to be an active member of the IWCA Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes please list any skills or facilities you have which may be useful to the organisation (please note that full training is available for any activities you agree to undertake for the IWCA)

Signature _____ Date _____

Please send completed forms to: Membership Applications, BM Box IWCA, London WC1N 3XX

Working Class Rule in Working Class Areas!

For the first time in a hundred years the working class is without a voice, without influence, without political representation. The IWCA is a working class organisation independent of any existing political party. Our purpose is to give the working class the opportunity to directly influence the political decisions that affect us all. With New Labour intent on continuing the Conservative attack on working class communities it is clear that we must now organise ourselves in our own interests. If we fail to do this no one else will do it for us.

Standing order authority

Thank you for making a donation/subscription to the IWCA. Please fill in this form and deliver to your bank or send to the address below.

To (your bank): _____

Address (in full): _____

Account name (your name): _____

Account number: _____

Sort code (6 digits): _____

Please make payments as follows to the debit of my account:

Payee: Independent Working Class Association, account no. 50728675 at the Unity Trust Bank, 4 The Square, Birmingham B15 1AR (08-60-01)

Amount: £ _____

To be paid on the _____ day of _____ (month), _____ (year) and thereafter monthly/yearly (delete as appropriate) until this order is cancelled by me in writing.

This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please give to your bank or send to:

The Treasurer
BM Box IWCA
London WC1N 3XX